Nami

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A great wave brings them together under improbable circumstances, and then tears them apart. Ten years later, Satsuki returns to where it all began.

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Nami

Introduction
Chapter 1

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Japan, present day.

Ten years ago, a great wave had barrelled into the coasts south of Tokyo, taking with it families, buildings and lives. In its wake it left only sadness.

Satsuki remembered the headlines like they were printed yesterday:

HUNDREDS DEAD

THOUSANDS DISPLACED

UTTER DEVASTATION

They went on and on.

She had been eleven then, concerned only with her studies and growing older when her mother had whisked her down into those destroyed lands, intent to lend a helping hand to those whose homes and families were rent asunder by that great wave. Satsuki was along for the ride, indifferent to the struggles of those poor souls unfortunate to be caught up in one of the worst natural disasters in Japan's recent history. She simply buried her nose in her books and read, shutting out the outside world for all time that wasn't reserved for eating and bathing.

That is, until she met *her* .

It was about a week after the event, and Satsuki and her mother were strolling down one of the few narrow streets to have been almost cleared in this small seaside town. Satsuki had looked up just for a moment, just long enough to catch sight of a girl, dirty and ragged, crouching in the ruins of an old home, unmoving. She was barefoot, her pants torn and shirt hanging from her shoulders

loosely. A bright red shock of hair fell away from her shaggy black mane. She was probably no older than Satsuki herself.

As Satsuki approached, the girl looked up into her eyes slowly. What Satsuki saw there were things she had not yet seen in someone's eyes, let alone someone so young: pain, longing, despair. Anger, defiance. Under it all, pleading. Not understanding her own actions, Satsuki had snatched the girl's hand, dragging her all the way back to the aid camp set up in the center of town by the Japanese Red Cross.

Over the coming days, the girl had been given a place to sleep, food, and medical attention. She refused to speak, showing no reaction to any person's inquiries as to her background or well-being. Yet every time Satsuki visited, which was daily (again Satsuki had no reason for this, perhaps it was boredom or perhaps something more), the girl would look into her eyes intently, as if trying to convey some hidden meaning just through the intensity of her gaze.

One day, after what seemed like days and days with no progress, the girl finally spoke. Satsuki was the only person in the room, and she almost jumped clear out of her skin at the sound of the girl's voice. It was raspy, angry and brash… but also sweet and genuine. It confused Satsuki, just like everything else about the girl.

"Ryuko." She said simply, lifting her head slowly and staring at Satsuki as she looked up from her book.

"W-What? Did you just talk?" Satsuki asked incredulously.

"My name's Ryuko." The girl repeated.

Satsuki smiled, standing from her chair in the corner of the room and snapping her book closed, approaching the bed where Ryuko sat quietly. She extended a small hand, the girl eyeing it suspiciously.

"I'm Satsuki. It's nice to finally meet you, Ryuko."

Ryuko had smiled back, taking Satsuki's hand in her own and shaking.

They had become fast friends.

During the hot summer days, they would stroll along the different avenues of the town, the cicadas chirping merrily as if playing the chorus of the long summer.

At night, Satsuki would hold Ryuko as she cried and cried. She had lost both parents when the wave hit. She relived those hellish hours every night, the wetness of her tears seeping into Satsuki's shirt as she cried herself to sleep. Satsuki would tuck her in, brushing the last remnants of tears from her cheeks.

Then it came time for Satsuki and her mother to leave the small seaside town that had been their home for some weeks.

Their last day had been spent perched on the last remaining section of the town's seawall, secluded from the rest of the town by a patch of trees that had been all but uprooted by the ocean's terrible, angry force.

Ryuko had kissed her then, just as the sun was setting, painting the sprawling ocean and sky alike with hues of pink and orange. It was simple, Ryuko pressing her lips to Satsuki's for a few seconds. Satsuki inhaled sharply, her heart pounding in her chest.

She didn't know what it meant. She was scared. Confused.

"Ryuko, I-I'm sorry I-" Satsuki had stammered, before bolting to her feet.

She had ran then, running from Ryuko and these confused, terrifying feelings in her chest. She had ran for what felt like hours, running and running until her legs burned and her lungs ignited along with them.

She hadn't seen Ryuko again after that.

Satsuki had never been one for crying, but as she stared from the plane window on the way back to Tokyo, warm tears had sprung to her eyes. In her hand she clutched the only physical trace she would have of that place by the sea, a small token Ryuko had pushed into her slender hands insistently some days before.

One half of a her late father's ornate pair of tailor's scissors, colored red and given to her on her tenth birthday. On the blade, in highly weathered marker, was written one word:

Ryuko .

Satsuki stepped from the taxi, handing her fare to the driver before hefting her bag onto her shoulders and inhaling the fresh scent of sea air. Before her was a tall apartment building on a hillside facing the sea and, hopefully, a destiny ten years in the making.

Satsuki was now twenty-one, and during the ten years that had passed since she was last here it seemed like the scars of the great wave that had swept through this land had been erased. Trees had been replanted, roads repaved, destroyed buildings bulldozed and newer, better buildings built in their place. The view from the plane of the town had been stunning; a beautiful seaside resort in the making. For now though, the town remained sleepy. Peaceful.

The memories of this place still haunted Satsuki, despite the changes.

She had had no luck during most of her trek around the town, stopping in to local shops, restaurants and bars with the only picture she had managed to find of her. A polaroid, partially damaged by age and wear. It was easy to see the girl's face though, smiling as her messy black and red hair blew in a wind that had blown away ten years past.

As she sat at a table outside a small cafe near the town's small university, Satsuki had had her first stroke of luck.

"Are you a friend of Ryuko's?" The kindly old waitress had asked, Satsuki's head whipping around and upwards to face her with a look of shock splashed across her sharp features.

"Well, yes. From a long time ago. I'm afraid I've lost contact with her and I was hoping to find where she lives." Satsuki said, holding out the picture for the waitress to examine fondly.

"I have her address written down somewhere for deliveries, dear. Give me one moment and I'll fetch it for you." The waitress had said, returning Ryuko's picture to her before placing a mug of coffee down on the table and sauntering inside.

Satsuki had clutched the written address like a precious child, inhaling her coffee before paying the waitress and thanking her profusely. She had almost ran flat-out into traffic as she tried to hail a taxi, throwing the address in the driver's face as she threw her bag inside the car and hopped in with a measure of urgency altogether unlike the mood of this sleepy seaside town.

Now she was here, the building which supposedly contained a love long lost, a friend faded away into the obscurity of memory. To make the girl from ten years ago real again was something that excited and terrified Satsuki in equal measure, making her heart thump in her chest like a taiko drum.

In the elevator, Satsuki placed her bag on the ground, unzipping the main compartment and extracting a small box, wrapped in plain red wrapping paper. The tag simply read "For: Ryuko", Satsuki deciding against any long drawn-out sentiment or professions of love. The Ryuko she knew wouldn't like that.

After a short ride, Satsuki exited on the fifth floor, double and triple checking that she had the apartment number correct: 560. Satsuki

drew a deep breath, her heart pounding in her ears and chest in equal measure. She knocked, sharply and succinctly, and waited.

No answer.

She knocked again, this time more forcefully in case her first ones were too inaudible.

Still no answer.

Satsuki knocked once more, practically hammering on the door this time.

Still no answer.

Satsuki's shoulders slumped, the two hands holding the wrapped box falling to her sides. Maybe she had the wrong apartment after all? Or could it be that Ryuko had moved or just was not home? All the frantic questions flitting in and out of Satsuki's mind prevented her from hearing the soft sound of the elevator door opening at the end of the hall.

A noise, like several bags of groceries hitting the ground with a soft *thud* and an even softer *swish* echoed out slightly closer from the end of the hallway, shaking Satsuki from her reverie. *Perhaps this person might have information on Ryuko* , Satsuki thought, whirling around with a bit too much force and making her long black hair spin around in a wide pinwheel.

The new arrival was a girl, shorter than Satsuki and clearly of the same age, possibly slightly younger. She wore high-top white sneakers, a pleated black skirt, and a white blouse untucked over which she wore a black and white leather jacket adorned with several different designs. A red bow was tied loosely through the collar of the blouse, and it matched perfectly with the bright red streak in the girl's messy black hair-

Satsuki's breath caught in her throat.

The red streak in her hair. The look in her eyes.

Satsuki began walking towards her, breaking into a jog and then a run as the girl at the end of the hallway did the same. Their gazes never left each other's eyes, and as they slammed into each other they wrapped each other in a full, warm, pure embrace.

Ryuko laughed loudly, Satsuki cried softly.

"Ryuko…" Satsuki muttered, burying her face in Ryuko's shoulder and letting out a series of soft sobs.

"I can't believe it. You came back, Sats." Ryuko laughed, pressing a hand into the back of Satsuki's head and stroking her silky black hair fondly.

They both smiled, Satsuki through her drying tears, as they held each other at arm's length, staring into each other's eyes. Satsuki was immensely comforted to see that the same intensity that had captured her all those years ago still burned in those gray irises, even more intense than it ever was before. Ryuko palmed Satsuki's hand, pulling her back towards the apartment door.

"I was just about to make dinner. Let me cook for you." Ryuko said plainly, unlocking the door and letting Satsuki into her small apartment.

"I'd love that." Satsuki answered, stepping inside and wiping the last of the tears from her face, smiling.

The apartment smelled of sandalwood, the living room walls adorned with an array of beautifully captivating art. At the opposite end of the room, a set of sliding doors opened onto a balcony with a perfect view of the sea stretching out forever from the coast.

Satsuki was pleased to find that Ryuko was an astoundingly good cook, whipping up a flawless batch of okonomiyaki with prodigious amounts of steamed rice and a warm bottle of sake. They enjoyed

the food at Ryuko's small dinner table, attempting to catch up as best they could between delicious bites.

Ryuko was a student at the local university, in her third year studying studio art. The pieces that had captured Satsuki's eyes as she entered the room were all Ryuko's own work, and Satsuki once more craned her neck to look about the room at them, bathed in the light of the setting sun.

After dinner, they retired to the balcony, sipping tea and enjoying the smell of the sea air blown gently in their faces by the summer's breeze.

"Ryuko… about that day. You know the one. I-" Satsuki began.

"Satsuki, please. It's all water under the bridge now-" Ryuko interrupted, before Satsuki silenced her by placing a slender hand over one of Ryuko's. Ryuko's face grew redder as Satsuki continued.

"It is my biggest regret, not finishing that day with you. I ran because I was confused, scared and unable to cope with the feelings I was having. Especially all that time ago, having feelings for another girl wasn't just considered abnormal, it was taboo. I was unprepared for what it meant. But… I always regretted leaving. I missed you terribly, and not a day went by in those ten years that I didn't think of you." Satsuki finished, her grip on Ryuko's hand tightening.

"Satsuki…" Ryuko said, her eyes growing wider.

Satsuki kissed her then, once more as they did ten years ago, the ocean breeze blowing their hair to and fro. It was simple, Satsuki pressing her lips to Ryuko's softly. Satsuki could feel Ryuko inhale sharply, her heart beating in her chest. This time, when they drew away from each other, neither ran. They stayed, embracing each other and kissing again and again, reliving that one fleeting moment from long ago over and over.

"I have something for you." Satsuki said after a particularly long kiss, flashing a small smile and retreiving the box from her bag, pushing it carefully into Ryuko's waiting palms.

Ryuko opened it, staring down into the box and gasping loudly. When her gaze returned to Satsuki's eyes, there were tears there despite her wide smile. In her hand she held the red half-scissor Ryuko had given Satsuki ten years ago, the one solitary word still etched on its blade in worn marker.

Ryuko.

"I'm glad you came back." Ryuko said into Satsuki's ear as she hugged her softly.

"Me too. I missed you." Satsuki returned softly, clutching the back of Ryuko's head for dear life as if she could fall off the Earth itself without her help.

Later that night, Satsuki cradled Ryuko's bare body in her arms. She was fast asleep, Satsuki enjoying the sound of her soft breaths mixed with the feeling of her chest rising and falling against her own. Ryuko's head was tucked just under her chin, and Satsuki inhaled, enjoying the scent of Ryuko's hair against her nostrils. It was the same as she remembered it all those years ago.

It all felt like a dream, really. Travelling all this distance and all this time just to see a girl she had only spent a couple of weeks with, and actually finding her. Such exploits wre only written about or portrayed in romance movies, and yet Satsuki had lived it.

A bit selfishly, Satsuki indulged a thought about the great wave that had swept through here so long ago. It had taken countless many with it, including Ryuko's parents. But it had given them each other, and despite the time that had passed between their fateful meeting and their reunion, had allowed for their love to finally come to fruition.

Satsuki smiled.

In the morning she would wake up in the arms of the one she loved, her dream now a reality.